

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

With festival season upon us quality new releases are somewhat thin on the ground. For some reason, once summer kicks in, people are more than happy to spend all their money listening to a crappy band playing on a rubbish sound system, while surrounded by idiots throwing lager in the air and rolling around in the mud. With the cost of going to a festival ever increasing, who has money left to buy new music these days? By **JOHN BITTLES**

Yet, as always, there are more than a few gems to be found in the new releases section of your local independent record store. This July we welcome the smoke-filled shoegaze of **MJ Guider**, **Sad City's** resplendent Balearic house, the spectral folk longing of **Bats For Lashes**, the swoon-some ambiance of **Ólafur Arnalds**, **Solomun's** groove-filled house, the techno funk of **Jackmaster**, and lots more.

So, without further ado, let us begin.



First up we have some atmospheric post-rock in the form of *Precious Systems*, **MJ Guider's** fantastic debut LP. Out mid-July on alternative haven *Kranky*, the album finds the New Orleans native follow the well received *Green Plastic* cassette from 2014 with a fuller, more dynamic sound. Part of this is due to **Melissa Guion** expanding the project to a trio, which seems to allow the band the freedom to explore a strange twilight domain. With everything enveloped in a bleary preternatural fog, bass rumbles, hazy vocals and dirge-like cranks all make their way to the surface occasionally, only to be engulfed once again. The ghosts of **Grouper**, **Widowspeak** and **Slowdive** occasionally raise their heads, while songs such as *Lit Negative*, *Triple Black* and the ten minute long *Evencycle* successfully merge the best of indie and pop with the strange to create something spine-tingling and new. At times surprisingly ethereal and romantic, **MJ Guider** has created a rock album which will make the perfect soundtrack to those moments when you are feeling vulnerable and alone. **9/10**.



House fans of the world take note, as late July sees the release of what is sure to be one of the albums of the year. *Shapes In Formation* is the record in question, and is Northern Irish-born, Glasgow-based producer **Sad City's** debut LP. Previous singles on labels such as *Phonica* and *Emotional Response* heralded the producer as one to watch. Yet, *Shapes In Formation* is a step forward and finds the musician refining and enhancing his trademark chilled house sound. Opening track **Rain Call** starts with classic sounding whoops and some Chicago inspired synths, before developing into a gorgeously summery groove. *Pace, Movements I-IV* meanwhile, is an eleven minute long ambient jam which works together with songs such as *People + Plants, Again* and *Music Removed* to create a sense of tranquillity practically guaranteed to calm your soul. It's not all Balearic sunsets though, as *Steady Jam* slowly but surely wraps a cut-up vocal over a lush slo mo beat, *Smoke* contains a darkened crunch perfect for the floors, while the twinkling keys and hazy synth tones of *Vexillationes* bring things to an epic close. Needless to say, if you consider yourself a fan of house music, hearing this is a must. **9/10.**



Following sublime offerings from **Jon Hopkins** and **Nils Frahm**, the *Late Night Tales* series makes a very welcome return this summer with a new offering from Icelandic composer **Ólafur Arnalds**. Gorgeously evocative, the mix takes in tracks by the likes of **Julianna Barwick, Rival Consoles, Four Tet, James Blake, Kiasmos**, and more. Spectral and haunting, the album is, at times, so quiet you almost have to strain your ears to hear what is going on. Yet, just as you find your mind about to drift, a heart-stopping melody, or some luscious strings will arrive to further enhance the mood. Exploring a world of strange audio imagery, many of the tracks on here seem to come from some vividly realised **Lynchian** place. In an LP made to be consumed as one glorious whole, it seems superfluous to pick highlights, yet the moment where the nursery rhyme melody of *Last Remnants* by **Koreless** blends beautifully into the lazy trip hop of *How Did I Get Here (Instrumental)* by **Odesza** is especially lush. While a lot of ambient music can receive bad press, **Ólafur Arnalds' Late Night Tales** perfectly illustrates just how vital a genre it can be. **9/10.**



As well as running his own record label (*Dynamic Music*), DJing around the world, and releasing a string of melodic house bombs, Hamburg artist **Solomun** is also one of house music's best known remixers for hire. Refits of **Broken Bells**, **Interpol**, **Editors**, **Foals**, **Lana Del Rey** and **Paul Kalkbrenner** inject a funky goodness into the source material to ensure that even the most insipid of songs will work on the most demanding of floors. It is no fluke that his *Vox Mix* of **Noir & Haze's** *Around* was made *Resident Advisor's* top remix of 2011. On *Selected Remixes 2009-2015* the best of these rerubs have been collected together to form one gloriously groove-filled LP. With 24 tracks spread across two CDs the listener is in for a treat. Whether you prefer his more pop focused refits (CD1), or his darker, club ready bombs (CD2), there will be plenty for you here. Deep, melodic, and, most importantly, funky as hell, these tracks contain a sumptuous house bounce which **Solomun** has made entirely his own. **8/10**.



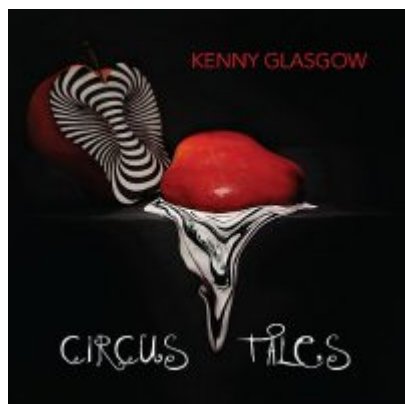
After the psychedelic nightmare of the fabulous **Sexwitch** project, **Natasha Khan** resumes her **Bats For Lashes** day job with the hushed electronic folk of *The Bride*. A concept album of sorts, the record follows the narrator as she waits for her fiancée at the altar, learns of his sad demise and then goes on a spiritual and emotional journey of self discovery. Even though the songs on *The Bride* touch on themes of loss, loneliness, anger and despair it never becomes overly depressing or bleak. For instance, opener *I Do* starts the album in a wave of optimism, as the bride-to-be imagines her approaching life with her future husband, while later tracks such as the heartbreakingly beautiful *I Will Love Again* offer more than a glimpse of hope beyond the despair. Other picks include *In God's House*, which pairs Natasha's pained vocals with hushed electronics and minor strings to stirring effect, *Never Forgive The Angels*, which brims with a sense of injustice and anger, while *Land's End* is tear-inducingly sad. While the backing music never quite matches the evocative imagery of **Natasha Khan's** lyrics, or the emotional power of her voice, *The Bride* is still a rich, rewarding album which bears repeated plays. **7/10**.



After sterling efforts from **Moodymann** and **Dam-Funk**, *K7's DJ Kicks* series keep their standards sky high with their latest offering by Glaswegian DJ and producer **Jackmaster**. In a house and techno heavy selection, the *Numbers* co-founder delves deep into his record bag for a mix which combines numerous styles and tempos to create one fabulous whole. At times deep and slow, others banging and tough, the mix moves from subtle beginnings to peak time anthems and back. Yet, the album's highlight comes early, with the gentle melodies and subdued beats of **Denis Sulta's** *My Soul Needs Justice*. Fans of his *It's Only Real* single from late last year know just how great this guy can be. Yet, *My Soul Needs Justice* may just be the best thing he has done so far. From here the mix builds in pace and intensity, with tracks by **Mike Dunn**, **Lory D**, **Mr. G**, **Basic Channel**, **Ricardo Villalobos**, **Robert Hood** and more urging your body to move. Yet, even when the mix is at its most dance floor focused **Jackmaster** still finds room for musicality and funk. In doing so he highlights everything we have come to love about the mix CD. **8/10**.



Created after a period of personal upheaval, *Donna*, **Cassy's** debut LP finally hit stores in June. While **Cassy** is perhaps better known for her DJ skills, playing at places such as *Panorama Bar*, *Rex Club* and *Trouw*, the smattering of singles and EPs she has released over the last few years have been highly regarded by those with a passion for deep, vocal-rich house. The singer/producer explains that *Donna* was born after "I had broken up with my husband, left Berlin, left my friends and left a way of making music and a way of living life". Yet, while the album could have become burdened by its creator's personal crises it contains a steady air of optimism throughout, its smooth house rhythms and classic Chicago-style beats appealing to your heart along with your feet. Produced in partnership with living legend **King Britt**, the record features **Cassy's** own vocals over a succession of smooth house, recalling the likes of **Inner City**, or **Virginia's** recent classic *Fierce For The Night*. Successfully merging the emotional with the demands of the dance floor, *Donna* is one fine LP. **8/10**.

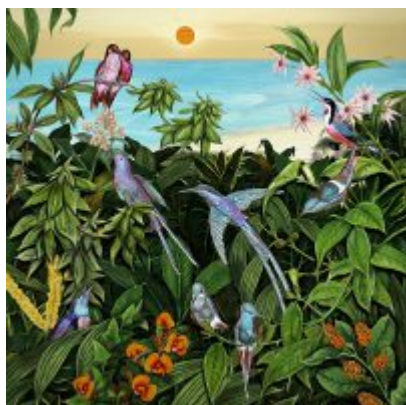


This month we'll end with **Kenny Glasgow**, who's *Taste Of The Low Life* from 2009 is rightly considered one of the greatest house albums of all time. Deep, groovy and trippy as hell, it's the type of record you can play to any dance hater to help them fall in love with house. After scoring a huge hit with the sleazy disco throb of *Without You*, Kenny took a break from solo productions to concentrate on **Art Department**, the band he formed with *No.19 Music* head **Jonny White**. After leaving the band Kenny has resumed solo work and returns late July with the dense, technoid futurism of his new LP, *Circus Tales*. While never quite matching the giddy heights of his debut, the album's ten tracks are deep, melodic and take great delight in working a steady groove until it attaches itself firmly in your head. *Come On* utilizes synth stabs, acid flecks and shuffling beats to create a heady, yet joyous beast, *Individuals* resembles a twisted take on slow-core electronic porn, *B-Strong* is a dark, echoey Detroit techno dirge, while *Action/Re:Action* ends things in thrillingly discordant style. Taking house to unfamiliar places, *Circus Tales* makes a stunning soundtrack to these messed-up times. **8/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Pescioli* by **Easy To Remember** - Ten tracks of house music the way God intended from the Unclear Records label heads. The rich, analogue grooves of *Mental Boulevard*, *Hijack Persuasion* and *Recollected Memories* have an emotional resonance which make them easy to love, **9/10**, *Puberty 2* by **Mitski** - Intelligent lyrics and sonic dirges combine in a bold, adventurous album where singer songwriter pop and post-punk collide, **8/10**, *So Far So Super* by **Superpitcher** - Originally released for *Record Store Day*, this greatest hits package now arrives on digital and contains twelve cuts which merge techno, house and pop with style, **8/10**, *Caramel* by **Konx-Om-Pax** - Out now on *Planet Mu*, **Tom Scholefield** follows up the dark electronica of *Regional Surrealism* with the dreamy and optimistic beatscapes of his new LP, **7/10**, *Hit Reset* by **The Julie Ruin** - A noisy and abrasive rock record, which sounds like it was created by the type of people who would happily spit in your face. In other words, it's great!, **8/10**, *Patience* by **The Invisible** - **The Invisible** make the kind of grown up pop/electronica which I would normally detest. Yet, there is something in *Patience*'s optimistic spirit which won me over to its

charm, **7/10**, and *aLIVE* by **Reboot** - Dark and druggy house which sounds like the sort of stuff you would hear in a dingy basement club where the music is great, but you never quite feel safe, **8/10**.



And let's not forget: *Sketches From An Island 2* by **Mark Barrott** - More Balearic brilliance from the *International Feel* icon. Chilled, melodic and with a liberal sprinkling of cheese, for those poor sods stuck in Belfast this Summer this is about as close as we'll get to feeling the warmth of the sun, **9/10**, *Realm Of Consciousness* by **V/A - Tale Of Us** launch their new *Afterlife* label with a superb, melody-rich ten track LP. The mid-paced throb of *Murphy's Law* by **Recondite**, the techno crunch of *Emeralds* by **Locked Groove**, and the sensual tones of **Ryan James Ford's** *Toree Bahrstad* are the picks for me, **9/10**, *Interior Architecture* by **M. Geddes Gengras** - LA synth wizard returns with four long, spacious sonic collages perfect for allowing your mind to drift, **8/10**, *Post Exotic* by **Bosco Rogers** - Surf-pop, psychedelia and indie rock sleaze combine in a record full of strutting riffs and slacker grooves, **7/10**, *SPC-Z* by **Jeroen Search** - Techno label *SPC* come to the end of their alphabet themed series with the electronic thud of this double 12inch from Dutch veteran **Jeroen Search**, **7/10**, *In The Backroom* by **Marlow** - Trip hop, funk, house and soul collide in an adventurous and playful record that might just bring a smile to your face, **7/10**, and *Unlock The Box* by **Philipp Gorbachev** - Ready made for festival season, these rough and ready electro throbbers will rock any crowd, **7/10**.

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